

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, July 22, 2016

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Notes from Commissioner Wagner

1. RIDE issues request for new charter applicants

As you may be aware, Governor Raimondo has signed into law Senate Bill 3075, relating to the “establishment of charter public schools.” This bill defines a new category of charter public schools: “network charter schools,” which are charter organizations that include more than one school under the same charter. The bill establishes new criteria for approval of any *new* network charter schools: Network charter applicants must provide a letter of support from the city or town council in each community from which the charter intends to draw students, both with an initial application and with any later application for expansion. (*Existing charters* are exempt from this requirement.) Additionally, the bill requires the Council on Elementary and Secondary Education to consider and “place substantial weight” on the fiscal, programmatic, and educational impact on all sending districts when considering applications for new charters or for charter expansion.

In signing this bill into law, Governor Raimondo wrote:

Our parents and families deserve the right to choose the best public-school option for their children, and many of the charter schools of this state have provided innovative and high-quality options for many students. A strong system of public education requires high-quality schools of all types and sizes to meet the varying needs of our students – traditional, charter, career and technical, etc.. Accordingly, I have said repeatedly since my first few months in office that I could not in good faith agree to any legislation that substantially reduced choice in our public-school system or made it harder for our high-quality charter schools to expand seats for the thousands of students currently on charter school waiting lists.

I am signing this act because it is a reasonable compromise that addresses the legitimate concerns raised by some municipalities and school districts, but also preserves parent choice. Further, it will not substantially change the state's ability to continue to authorize high-quality charter schools.

Now that we have clarity regarding the approval process for new charters and for charter expansion, we have issued a "request for new charter applicants" for schools planning to open in the fall of 2017. This request has a tight timeline, with proposals due in September for Council preliminary approval in January 2017. We will soon release a request for new charter applications for schools to open in the fall of 2018; these applications will be due in June 2017, for Council preliminary approval in September 2017.

For more information on the request for applications (for fall 2017 openings), the timetable for fall 2017 and fall 2018 applications, and further resources on starting a charter public school, see:

[Request for Applicants Link](#)

[Timetable Link](#)

[Resources Link](#)

2. Ponaganset science teacher sets world record for flight efficiency using biofuel blend

Congratulations to Ross McCurdy, a science teacher (chemistry and alternative energy) at Ponaganset High School (Foster-Glocester), who, along with his co-pilot, Thierry P. Saint Loup, set a world record for flight efficiency. Last week they flew a Cessna 182 for 9.1 hours (848 nautical miles) using only 56 gallons of fuel for a world record 15.1 nautical miles per gallon. Their plane used 50 percent biofuel (from Camelina plant-seed oil), demonstrating the potential of aviation

biofuels and renewable energy. Ross was the 2015 Region 1 winner of Presidential Innovation Award for Environmental Educators.

3. *Repeating from Field Memo Alert 7-18-16: RIDE announces 2016-17 PARCC administration information*

As we enter our third year of the PARCC assessment, we would like to confirm some important testing policies for the coming school year. Under the No Child Left Behind Act and the new federal legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), public schools are accountable for all enrolled students. Therefore, our statewide testing policy provides that all students in tested grades or courses who are enrolled in a public school are expected to participate in state assessments.

In addition to PARCC testing this coming year, all Rhode Island public-school sophomores and juniors will have the opportunity, if they choose to do so, to take the PSAT/NMSQT and SAT, respectively, for free during the school day. (See [FAQ document](#) for details). Districts may decide locally to administer the PSAT or SAT to all students.

As we transition to new high-school graduation requirements and a new accountability system aligned with ESSA requirements, we must continue to guard against over-testing. Therefore, while we encourage students in grade 10 to participate in the free PSAT test and students in grade 11 to participate in the free SAT test, we will administer PARCC assessments for students in *grades 3 through 9 only* (or, for math, upon completion of algebra in grade 9, 10, or 11). The required tested grades or courses are as follows:

- *Grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8: PARCC English Language Arts (ELA)/Literacy and Mathematics assessments*

- *Grade 9: PARCC ELA/Literacy Grade 9 assessment (Note: We will no longer administer the PARCC Grade 10 ELA/Literacy assessment.)*
- *Algebra I, Geometry, or Algebra II: Students must take one PARCC math test in high school. For most students, this will be the PARCC Algebra I test (in grade 9, 10, or 11). For students who took algebra in middle school, the required test while in high school would be the PARCC Geometry or Algebra II test*

Over the course of the school year, we will hold conversations with you and other stakeholders to determine if we should revise the high-school assessment program to include the PSAT and/or SAT assessments as part of the accountability process.

As [previously announced](#) (see 1-29-16 Field Memo, item #6; 12-24-15 Field Memo, item #2), all schools will be expected to administer the PARCC *computer-based* assessments in this coming school year. PARCC paper-based assessments will be allowed only for students with documented accommodations that require assessments to be administered via paper and pencil or if a waiver is granted to a school that has not yet been able to fully implement its plan to transition to a full computer-based administration.

Also, we will have a single PARCC testing window this coming year, and schools will have up to 30 school days to administer computer-based assessments.

We will send the full memo on PARCC assessment requirements, which provides additional details on the limited exceptions to these requirements, out to the field via the various RIDE listservs, and we will also post the full memo on the RIDEmap District Exchange. If you have

questions about the PARCC assessments, please send them to PARCC@ride.ri.gov.

4. Statewide administration of voluntary PSAT for grade-10 students scheduled for October 19

As you may know, in the coming school year all Rhode Island public-school sophomores will have the opportunity to take the PSAT/NMSQT this fall and all Rhode Island public-school juniors will have the opportunity to take the SAT this spring. Both tests will be *free* if administered on the specified school testing date (more information available [online](#)).

The PSAT/NMSQT testing date will be **October 19**. We strongly encourage you to participate in this program and provide all of your grade-10 students the opportunity take the PSAT/NMSQT this fall.

If your LEA chooses to administer the PSAT/NMSQT to enrolled grade-10 students, schools must order test books for students by going to <http://collegeboard.org/school>.

To participate, you must order test books by **September 23**. If you have already placed an order for the PSAT/NMSQT and would like to increase your order, you may do so through **September 23**. If you would like to decrease your test-book order, the deadline is **September 2**.

More information on the PSAT is available at:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/psat-nmsqt-psat-10/k12-educators/psat-nmsqt-dates>

RIDE is contracting with the College Board and will pay for the PSAT/NMSQT tests that Rhode Island public schools have ordered for

their enrolled sophomores who test on October 19 or on the make-up date. If your LEA chooses to administer the PSAT/NMSQT to additional students (e.g., students not in grade 10) the school may also order those test-books, but the school will be billed separately for any public-school student who is not enrolled in grade 10 or who did not test on the specified testing date.

If you have any questions about the PSAT or SAT administration, please send them to Dr. Kevon Tucker-Seeley (kevon.tucker-seeley@ride.ri.gov).

From RIDE

Innovation:

5. Enrollment still open for Advanced Coursework Network courses; LEAs can still become Network Members

The first course-registration and enrollment period of the Advanced Coursework Network has been a success. There has been a great deal of demand for course enrollment during the first registration session. To date, we have had more than 500 course registrations representing approximately 350 students from across Rhode Island. Students will be taking courses in computer science, psychology, music production, EMT training, community development, nautical science, sports and event management, digital photography, world languages, introduction to pharmacy, and in many more subjects.

In the first year of the statewide program, 180 courses will be available from 15 course providers. Middle-school and high-school students from across Rhode Island can enroll in high-value academic and career-focused courses at no cost to the student, family, or school district. Students have the potential to earn college credit, work-ready

credentials, and additional high-school credit. Courses begin this coming school year.

LEAs can still sign on to become a Network Member for the coming (2016-17) school year, and there are still open seats in courses. For more information on becoming a Network Member or to access course registration, see:

www.ride.ri.gov/advancedcoursework.

6. Registration open for 5th Annual Innovation Powered by Technology Conference

Register today and save for the [5th annual Innovation Powered by Technology Conference](#), scheduled for **September 17**, at the Rhode Island Convention Center. Connect with fellow educators and school leaders on the effective use of technology, digital learning, and blended learning. Collaborate with and be inspired by educators and students from across Rhode Island. Immerse yourself in ideas, strategies, and resources. Meet face to face with well-respected professionals in the education field. Be part of the 5th annual statewide conference and connect, communicate, and collaborate about strong and meaningful pathways leading to student success. Learn how Rhode Island educators are systematically creating the conditions for success for a true personalized learning experience to occur.

There will be something for everyone, including student demonstrations, hands-on experiences, strategies and solutions, panel discussions, networking conversations, digital-champion celebrations, and immediate opportunities to get involved in the movement. Learn from the Rhode Island Mayoral Academies about the 12 Summit Basecamp schools in Rhode Island. Jump on the bus tour on Friday, September 16, to visit three of the Summit Basecamp schools in Rhode

Island. Extend summer learning through the URI Summer Institute on Digital Learning, the Rhode Island Society of Technology Educators Google Apps for Education Summit, and the Highlander Institute Fuse RI Programs. Gain access to free platforms, tools, and apps. Connect with sponsors providing just-in-time solutions that can accelerate personalization in your schools.

For more information about the conference, visit:
<http://ride.ri.gov/conference> or contact Holly Walsh, at
holly.walsh@ride.ri.gov.

Instruction:

7. Criteria updated for students' exit from programs for English learners

RIDE has issued a document entitled "State-Defined Required English Language Instructional Program Exit Criteria." This document outlines the minimum criteria that English Learners (ELs) must meet in order to be eligible for exit from an English-language instructional program. These criteria were developed by a committee of ESL/bilingual education professionals from across Rhode Island in collaboration with RIDE staff members.

The criteria outlined in this document are a minimum requirement for eligibility to be considered for exit from an English-language instructional program. A student may not be exited from the program unless he or she meets the eligibility requirements; however, an LEA is not under any obligation to exit a student who exceeds these requirements if the LEA has compelling evidence that continued participation in the program is in the best interest of the student. Whether the decision is made to exit or retain a student who has

exceeded these minimum requirements, the LEA must explain the decision to the parent or guardian of the student.

You can access the exit criteria here:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/StudentsFamilies/EnglishLearnerPrograms/ELPrograms.aspx#124741-entranceexit-criteria>.

If you have questions regarding these exit criteria, please contact Jillian Belanger, at jillian.belanger@ride.ri.gov or 222-8480, or Emily Klein, at emily.klein@ride.ri.gov or 222-8985.

Early Learning:

8. ECS issues report on K-3 quality

The Education Commission of the States has issued a report on state policies and practices for early learning (grades kindergarten through 3) in all 50 states:

50-state comparison: K-3 Quality

<http://www.ecs.org/50-state-comparison-k-3-quality/>.

From the U.S. Department of Education (USED)

9. USED issues guidance on humanities-based educational strategies

Last week, in response to demand, the USED issued a [Dear Colleague Letter](#) to support humanities-based educational strategies in the 2016-17 school year. For this guidance, the USED broadly defines the humanities to include social studies (including history, civics, government, economics, and geography), literature, art, music, and

philosophy, as well as other non-STEM subjects that are not generally covered by an English/language arts curriculum.

The examples focus on:

- increasing student access to humanities courses and experiences, including out-of-school programs, humanities-themed schools, and career pathways;
- supporting the knowledge and expertise in the humanity disciplines of school educators through recruitment, preparation, support, and retention; and
- increasing student access to materials and equipment needed to support inquiry-based pedagogy and active learning.

A holistic education allows educators to teach their students in a manner that promotes the promise of learning and provides students with knowledge necessary to succeed in a complex society.

10. USED announces Equity Assistance Centers grant competition

The [Equity Assistance Centers grant competition](#) is underway. These centers provide technical assistance and training, upon request, to districts and other responsible governmental agencies in the areas of sex, race, national origin, and religion to promote equitable education opportunities. Applications are due **August 22**.

11. New federal legislation promotes diversity in schools

On July 12, U.S. Senator Chris Murphy, a member of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee, and Congresswoman Marcia Fudge, a member of the U.S. House Education and the Workforce Committee, [introduced the](#) *Stronger Together*

School Diversity Act to promote diversity in schools ([press call audio](#)). The legislation builds on President Obama's [Stronger Together budget proposal](#) and consists of a voluntary plan to support the development and expansion of new and existing community-driven strategies to increase diversity in schools. Last month, Senator Murphy joined Secretary King for an event to discuss the opportunity for increased diversity in schools and communities to drive positive student outcomes in school and in life.

12. NCES issues reports on early care, math and science abilities, CTE course-taking, compensation, and trends on children, families

Don't miss these new reports from the USED National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): "[Primary Early Care and Education Arrangements and Achievement at Kindergarten Entry](#);" "[How America's High School Students Perceive their Math and Science Abilities](#);" "[Career and Technical Education \(CTE\) Coursetaking and Postsecondary Enrollment and Attainment](#);" data on [postsecondary tuition, fees, and degrees](#); and [compensation for public school instructional staff](#). Also, "[America's Children 2016](#)," prepared by the 23 federal agencies of the Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics (including NCES), is a useful compendium of the latest data and trends on children and their families.

13. Office for Civil Rights launches provides resources for preventing religious discrimination

All students—regardless of race, national origin, religion, disability, or sex—deserve access to a high-quality education, from preschool through college. Throughout the last seven-and-a-half years, the Obama administration and the USED have worked to safeguard the rights and protections of our students by enforcing our nation's civil

rights laws and implementing regulations that prohibit discrimination and providing additional support to educators to prevent such discrimination.

Building on these critical efforts, the USED Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has launched a [webpage](#) that consolidates resources from across the Federal government about religious discrimination. The new page links to OCR's relevant policy guidance and case resolutions involving religious discrimination claims, as well as resources in various languages and from other Federal agencies.

We also revised our [online complaint form](#) to clarify when OCR can investigate complaints from individuals who believe they have experienced racial, ethnic, or national origin discrimination involving their religion. Both efforts aim to ensure that students of all religious backgrounds receive the full protection of federal civil rights laws.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/InsideRIDE/FieldMemos.aspx>